

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022*

## **Remarks on United States Democracy**

*November 2, 2022*

*The President.* Good evening. Thank you. Please. Thank you. Good evening, everyone.

*Audience members.* Good evening.

*The President.* Just a few days ago, a little before 2:30 a.m. in the morning, a man smashed the back windows and broke into the home of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the third highest ranking official in America.

He carried in his backpack zip ties, duct tape, rope, and a hammer. As he told the police, he had come looking for Nancy Pelosi to take her hostage, to interrogate her, to threaten to break her kneecaps. But she wasn't there.

Her husband, my friend Paul Pelosi, was home alone. The assailant tried to take Paul hostage. He woke him up, and he wanted to tie him up. The assailant ended up using a hammer to smash Paul's skull. Thankfully, by the grace of God, Paul survived.

All of this happened after the assault, and it just—it's hard to even say; it's hard to even say—after the assailant entered the home asking: "Where's Nancy? Where's Nancy?" Those were the very same words used by the mob when they stormed the United States Capitol on January the 6th when they broke windows, kicked in the doors, brutally attacked law enforcement, roamed the corridors hunting for officials, and erected gallows to hang the former Vice President, Mike Pence.

It was an enraged mob that had been whipped up into a frenzy by a President repeating over and over again the "big lie" that the election of 2020 had been stolen. It's a lie that fueled the dangerous rise in political violence and voter intimidation over the past 2 years.

Even before January the 6th, we saw election officials and election workers in a number of States subject to menacing calls, physical threats, even threats to their very lives. In Georgia, for example, the Republican secretary of state and his family were subjected to death threats because he refused to break the law and give in to the defeated President's demand: just find him 11,780 votes. "Just find me 11,780 votes."

Election workers, like Shaye Moss and her mother Ruby Freeman, were harassed and threatened just because they had the courage to do their job and stand up for truth, to stand up for our democracy.

This institution—this intimidation, this violence against Democrats and Republicans and nonpartisan officials just doing their jobs are the consequence of lies told for power and profit, lies of conspiracy and malice, lies repeated over and over that generate a cycle of anger, hate, vitriol, and even violence.

In this moment, we have to confront those lies with the truth. The very future of our Nation depends on it.

My fellow Americans, we're facing a defining moment, an inflection point. And we must, with one overwhelming, unified voice, speak as a country and say there is no place—no place—for voter intimidation or political violence in America, whether it's directed at Democrats or Republicans. No place, period. No place ever.

I speak today near Capitol Hill, near the U.S. Capitol, the citadel of our democracy.

I know that there is a lot at stake in these midterm elections, from our economy, to the safety of our streets, to our personal freedoms, to the future of health care and Social Security and Medicare. It's all important.

But we'll have our differences. We'll have our difference of opinion. And that's what it's supposed to be. But there is something else at stake: democracy itself.

I'm not the only one who sees it. Recent polls have shown that an overwhelming majority of Americans believe our democracy at—is at risk, that our democracy is under threat. They too see that democracy is on the ballot this year, and they're deeply concerned about it.

So today I appeal to all Americans, regardless of party, to meet this moment of national and generational importance. We must vote, knowing what's at stake is not just the policy of the moment, but institutions that have held us together as we have sought a more perfect Union are also at stake. We must vote knowing who we have been, what we're at risk of becoming.

Look, my fellow Americans, the old expression, "Freedom is not free; it requires constant vigilance." From the very beginning, nothing has been guaranteed about democracy in America. Every generation has had to defend it, protect it, preserve it, choose it, for that's what democracy is: It's a choice, a decision of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The issue couldn't be clearer, in my view. We, the people, must decide whether we'll have fair and free elections and every vote counts. We, the people, must decide whether we're going to sustain a republic where reality is accepted, the law is obeyed, and your vote is truly sacred.

We, the people, must decide whether the rule of law will prevail or whether we'll allow the dark forces to thirst—that thirst for power put ahead of the principles that we—have long guided us.

You know, American democracy is under attack because the defeated former President of the United States refuses to accept the results of the 2020 election. He refuses to accept the will of the people. He refuses to accept the fact that he lost.

He has abused his power and put the loyalty to himself before loyalty to the Constitution. And he's made a "big lie" an article of faith in the MAGA Republican Party, the minority of that party.

The great irony about the 2020 election is, it's the most attacked election in our history. And yet—and yet—there is no election in our history that we can be more certain of its results. Every legal challenge that could have been brought was brought. Every recount that could have been undertaken was undertaken. Every recount confirmed the results. Wherever fact or evidence have been demanded, the "big lie" has been proven to be just that, a big lie, every single time.

Yet, now, extreme MAGA Republicans aim to question not only the legitimacy of past elections, but elections being held now and into the future. The extreme MAGA element of the Republican Party—which is a minority of that party, as I said earlier, but is its driving force—is trying to succeed where they failed in 2020 to suppress the right of voters and subvert the electoral system itself.

That means denying your right to vote and deciding whether your vote even counts. Instead of waiting until an election is over, they're starting well before it. They're starting now.

They've emboldened violence and intimidation of voters and election officials. It's estimated that there are more than 300 election deniers on the ballot all across America this year.

We can't ignore the impact this is having on our country. It's damaging, it's corrosive, and it's destructive. And I want to be very clear: This is not about me. It's about all of us. It's about what makes America "America." It's about the durability of our democracy.

For democracies are more than a form of government. They're a way of being, a way of seeing the world, a way that defines who we are, what we believe, why we do what we do. Democracy is simply that fundamental.

We must, in this moment, dig deep within ourselves and recognize that we can't take democracy for granted any longer. With democracy on the ballot, we have to remember these first principles. Democracy means the rule of the people, not the rule of monarchs or the monied, but the rule of the people.

Autocracy is the opposite of democracy. It means the rule of one: one person, one interest, one ideology, one party.

To state the obvious, the lives of billions of people, from antiquity till now, have been shaped by the battle between these competing forces: between the aspirations of the many and the greed and power of the few, between the people's right for self-determination and the self-seeking autocrat, between the dreams of a democracy and the appetites of an autocracy.

What we're doing now is going to determine whether democracy will long endure. It, in my view, is the biggest of questions: whether the American system that prizes the individual, bends toward justice, and depends—depends on the rule of law—whether that system will prevail.

This is the struggle we're now in: a struggle for democracy, a struggle for decency and dignity, a struggle for prosperity and progress, a struggle for the very soul of America itself. Make no mistake: Democracy is on the ballot for us all.

We must remember that democracy is a covenant. We need to start looking out for each other again, seeing ourselves as "We the People," not as entrenched enemies. This is a choice we can make. Disunion and chaos are not inevitable.

There's been anger before in America. There's been division before in America. But we've never given up on the American experiment, and we can't do that now. The remarkable thing about American democracy is this: Just enough of us, on just enough occasions, have chosen not to dismantle democracy, but to preserve democracy. We must choose that path again.

Because democracy is on the ballot, we have to remember that even in our darkest moments there are fundamental values and beliefs that unite us as Americans, and they must unite us now.

What are they? Well, I think, first, we believe the vote in America is sacred: to be honored, not denied; respected, not dismissed; counted, not ignored. A vote is not a partisan tool to be counted when it helps your candidates and tossed aside when it doesn't.

Second, we must, with an overwhelming voice, stand against political violence and voter intimidation. Period. Stand up and speak against it.

We don't settle our differences in America with a riot, a mob, or a bullet, or a hammer. We settle them peacefully at the battle box—at the ballot box. We have to be honest with ourselves though. We have to face this problem. We cannot turn away from it. We can't pretend it's just going to solve itself.

There is an alarming rise in the number of our people in this country condoning political violence or simply remaining silent because silence is complicity. The disturbing rise in voter intimidation. The pernicious tendency to excuse political violence or at least—at least—trying to explain it away.

We can't allow this sentiment to grow. We must confront it head on now. It has to stop now. I believe the voices excusing or calling for violence and intimidation are a distinct minority in America, but they're loud, and they are determined.

We have to be more determined. All of us who reject political violence and voter intimidation—and I believe that's the overwhelming majority of the American people—all of us must unite to make it absolutely clear that violence and intimidation have no place in America.

And third, we believe in democracy. That's who we are as Americans. I know it isn't easy. Democracy is imperfect. It always has been. But we are all called to defend it now. Now.

History and common sense tell us that liberty, opportunity, and justice thrive in a democracy, not in an autocracy.

At our best, America is not a zero-sum society where for you to succeed, someone else has to fail. The promise of America is big enough—it's big enough—for everyone to succeed. Every generation opening the door of opportunity just a little wider. Every generation, including those who had been excluded before.

We believe we should leave no one behind, because each one of us is a child of God, and every person—every person—is sacred. If that's true, then every person's rights must be sacred as well. Individual dignity, individual worth, individual determination—that's America; that's democracy. And that's what we have to defend.

Look, even as I speak here tonight, 27 million people have already cast their ballot in the midterm elections. Millions more will cast their ballots in the final days leading up to November the 9th—8th, excuse me. And for the first time—this is the first time since the national election of 2020, once again, we're seeing record turnout all over the country.

And that's good. We want Americans to vote. We want every American's voice to be heard.

Now we have to move the process forward. We know that more and more ballots are cast in early voting or by mail in America. And we know that many States don't start counting those ballots until after the polls close on November 8.

That means, in some cases, we won't know the winner of the election for a few days—until after a few days after the election. It takes time to count all legitimate ballots in a legal and orderly manner.

It's always been important for citizens in a democracy to be informed and engaged. Now it's important for citizens to be patient as well. That's how this is supposed to work.

This is also the first election since the events of January 6, when the armed, angry mob stormed the U.S. Capitol. I wish—I wish—I could say the assault on our democracy had ended that day, but I cannot.

As I stand here today, there are candidates running for every level of office in America—for Governor, Congress, attorney general, secretary of state—who won't commit—they will not commit to accepting the results of elections that they're running in.

That is a path to chaos in America. It's unprecedented, it's unlawful, and it's un-American. As I've said before, you can't love your country only when you win.

This is no ordinary year. So I ask you to think long and hard about the moment we're in. In a typical year, we're often not faced with questions of whether the vote we cast will preserve democracy or put us at risk. But this year, we are.

This year, I hope you'll make the future of our democracy an important part of your decision to vote and how you vote.

I hope you'll ask a simple question of each candidate you might vote for: Will that person accept the legitimate will of the American people and the people voting in his district or her district? Will that person accept the outcome of the election, win or lose?

The answer to that question is vital. And in my opinion, it should be decisive. On the answer to that question hangs the future of the country we love so much and the fate of the democracy that has made so much possible for us.

Too many people have sacrificed too much for too many years for us to walk away from the American project and democracy. Because we've enjoyed our freedoms for so long, it's easy to think they'll always be with us no matter what.

But that isn't true today. In our bones, we know democracy at risk—is at risk. But we also know this: It's within our power, each and every one of us, to preserve our democracy. And I believe we will. I think I know this country. I know we will.

You have the power. It's your choice. It's your decision. The fate of the Nation, the fate of the soul of America lies where it always does: with the people—in your hands, in your heart, and your ballot.

My fellow Americans, we'll meet this moment. We just need to remember who we are. We are the United States of America. There's nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity if we do it together.

May God bless you all, may God protect our troops, and may God bless those standing guard over our democracy.

Thank you, and Godspeed.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:01 p.m. at the Columbus Club in Union Station. In his remarks, he referred to David DePape, the alleged assailant in the attack on Paul Pelosi, husband of Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, in their San Francisco, CA, residence on October 28; former President Donald J. Trump; Bradford J. Raffensperger, Georgia Secretary of State; and Wandrea "Shaye" Moss and her mother Ruby Freeman, former employees in the Elections Department of Fulton County, GA. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 3.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : U.S. democracy.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* DePape, David; Freeman, Ruby; Moss, Wandrea "Shaye"; Pelosi, Nancy; Pelosi, Paul F., Sr.; Pence, Michael R.; Raffensperger, Bradford J.; Trump, Donald J.

*Subjects:* California : Attack on Paul F. Pelosi, Sr., husband of Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi in their San Francisco residence; Civil rights : Voting rights; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; District of Columbia : 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; Elections : 2020 Presidential and congressional elections; Elections : 2022 congressional elections; Elections : Voter participation; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Presidency, U.S : U.S. democracy, remarks in Washington, DC; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD202200996.